Languaging features and identity-positionings in contemporary social media: A contrastive analysis between global South-North spaces[1]

Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta, Jönköping University, Sweden
Aprameya Rao, Freelance Journalist, India

A statement of the theoretical and methodological frameworks used

Decolonial studies enable asking new questions that destabilize established Eurocentric models of social justice and communication. Drawing inspiration from a decolonial-turn and sociocultural perspectives on communication and participation, this paper centerstages analytical engagement with, (i) online actions of political parties and citizens, and (ii) alternative epistemologies where efforts are made to engage with concepts and issues from the global South. It aims to contribute to critical social-humanistic perspectives that can enable unpacking and illuminating northern hegemonies by presenting cross-disciplinary analysis of peoples' positioning, participation, and language-use or languaging in contemporary mediascapes of the nation-states India and Sweden. Bringing to bear that language does not only mirror reality, but is also a constitutive cultural tool, this paper aims to highlight the contrastive "ways-of-being-with-words" through which political parties and citizens "language" (i.e. deploy semiotic resources across language-varieties, modalities, including imagery) and position themselves in mediascapes.

Research questions

1) How do institutions like political parties and individuals' "language" in mediascapes across the national contexts of India and Sweden?
2) What are the similarities and dissimilarities in languaging in the mediascapes of the two focused nation-states?
3) How are identity-positionings of political parties and individuals related to languaging in mediascapes across the national contexts of India and Sweden?

Empirical materials explored

The datasets explored include posts from late autumn 2017 on the social media pages of two political parties from the nation-states of India and Sweden. While the BJP had the majority in the Indian parliament and INC was the largest opposition party in India, Socialdemokraterna constituted the largest party in the coalition-government and Nya Moderaterna was the largest opposition party in Sweden.

Preliminary findings

The patterns that emerge from the contrastive analysis of languaging and identity highlights a sharp contrast between the two nation-states. For instance, the ways in which multiple or single language varieties and oral and written language modalities are deployed: the Indian dataset illustrates the use of different language varieties and scripts including a higher use of videos and infographics. The Swedish dataset, on the other hand, displays a monolingual

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[1] This paper builds upon a recently published study: Bagga-Gupta, S. & Rao, A. (2018). Languaging in digital global South-North spaces in the twenty-first century: media, language and identity in political discourse. Bandung: Journal of the Global South. 5(3), 1-34. https://rdcu.be/NbDk

character and subtitling of videos. The identity-positionings of political parties and individuals are related to the identified patterns of languaging in specific ways.

Relevance to the conference
This study highlights the need to explore the meaning of multilingualism in contexts where multilingualism is the norm. While the nation-state of India is recognized as being highly multilingual, there exists a mono-multilingual tension in Sweden. Multilingualism is the de facto "mother-tongue" of Indian citizens and social media in India is currently experiencing both major growth and tensions in terms of "Bhasha battlegrounds" where languages play a key role in democratic engagements of politicians and citizens. Given the recognition currently being accorded to diversity and the de facto multilingual nature of Sweden, the highly monolingual languaging in the Swedish dataset is surprising. The patterns of language-use and their relationship with identity positioning in the Indian dataset are relevant for non-normative ways of framing integration and democratic agendas for minorities, migrants and mainstream communities in Sweden.

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